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NATIVISM IN THE LOWER MISSISSIPPI VALLEY

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By Arthur C. Cole

Political nativism, as it appeared in the three decades preceding the Civil War, was a movement of protest against the part which foreigners and foreign-born citizens were allowed to play, whether legally or fraudulently, in the practical workings of the American political system, and against the social problems and economic burdens which foreign immigration was thrusting upon the United States. "America for the Americans" was the watch-word; it was interpreted to mean that none but the native-born should be elected to hold office. The leading tenet of the nativists required an extension of the residence requirement for naturalization so as to insure that the foreigner had ample time to lose all active political interest in his fatherland and to fit himself for the duties of American citizenship. In the Northern Atlantic States, where the Irish were especially numerous and the Roman Catholic hierarchy powerful and active, nativism had also a strongly anti-Catholic tinge.[1] There were three outbursts of nativism, one in each of the three decades noted, but only in the last case did the movement enter the field of national politics with any possibility of success. It was at its best when it operated locally in the field of municipal and State politics, where it oftentimes sought, as a healthy movement for reform, to bring public attention to real evils and to real needs.

The declaration was frequently made by nativist leaders that foreigners were the objects of hostility not on account of either their birth or their religion but rather because of "their moral and political idiosyncrasies, hostile

[1] Scisco's *Political Nativism in New York*, pp. 16 ff., 243 ff.

to our interests."[2] A proper question, therefore, is: What justification was there for a political organization in the Lower Mississippi Valley upon such a basis?

There is a general impression that the Southern portion of the Union did not witness the results, whether good or evil, of the flood of immigrants that was pouring into the country in steadily increasing volume. The great body of them, indeed, probably seeking a climate and environment similar to that of the country of their nativity, landed at the Northern ports and settled in and about the large cities on the coast or made their way with the westward movement into the interior. New Orleans, on the other hand, was a popular port of entry with the immigrating aliens, since it had, at that time when immigration was left to State regulation, no effective restrictions upon the admission of persons of questionable physical, mental, or moral capacity. By 1850, New Orleans was second only to New York in the number of foreign arrivals.[3] The aim of those who selected the Southern port was usually to make their way to the Northwest by following up the Mississippi River and its tributaries.[4] The fittest of them did so but since the United States was then the dumping ground of crowded Europe, whose nations sent over many of the inmates of their alms-houses, asylums, hospitals, and prisons, the larger cities and thickly settled districts acted as a filter which kept behind the scum, those unfit to attack the problems of the frontier. Thus Louisiana and Missouri retained a large share of the less desirable foreigners, as did Kentucky on the other side of the Missis-

[2] Whitney's *Defence of American Policy*, pp. 238, 239.

[3] Bromwell's *History of Immigration*, pp. 145, 149, 153, 157, 161, 165.

[4] Now and then a European traveler prophesied that the future would see ocean-going vessels making their way up the Mississippi and its tributaries and by canal to Lake Michigan. Ziegler's *Reise durch Nord-Americka*, in *Wisconsin Historical Collections*, Vol. XII, p. 312.

sippi River. These three States contained in 1850 nearly two-thirds of the total number of foreigners in the South.[5]

The problems regarding the foreigner in New Orleans, St. Louis, and Louisville were little different from those in their sister cities of the North. They had a large foreign-born population, which in St. Louis outnumbered the native-born.[6] Their hospitals were largely filled with foreign-born patients, their jails and prisons with foreign-born convicts, their alms-houses with foreign-born paupers, their streets with foreign-born mendicants, pick-pockets, thieves, and their kind. In the year ending June 1, 1850, Louisiana supported nearly twice as many foreign paupers as native-born, while Missouri convicted nearly three times as many foreign as native criminals.[7] Charity Hospital, New Orleans, in various years admitted from two to eight times as many foreigners as natives.[8] Inasmuch as the foreign-born population of these two States was scarcely one-fifth of that of the native-born, the seriousness of the problems growing out of foreign immigration is evident. The foreigners in general retained their pride for the fatherland and associated together in clannish exclusiveness, forming their own secret societies, which were sometimes political, and even their own military companies.[9] In addition, they constituted a source

[5] DeBow's *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, p. 52.

[6] In New Orleans the two elements were nearly equal, and in Louisville the foreigners were nearly one-half as numerous as the native Americans. — DeBow's *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, p. 399.

[7] DeBow's *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, pp. 163, 164; *Niles' Register*, Vol. LXVII, p. 384.

[8] A joint committee appointed by the Louisiana legislature in 1835 reported the treatment of 1677 American and 4287 foreign patients in the preceding year. — *Niles' Register*, Vol. XLIX, p. 62. In 1843 there were 5012 admissions of which 3859 were foreigners. — *Niles' Register*, Vol. LXV, p. 343.

[9] In 1854 there were in New Orleans secret societies of Germans, Irish, Portugese, and Hebrews besides the Turners and the St. George Society. *New Orleans Bulletin*, March 17, 1854. Every large city had its company of Irish Jasper Greens, Hibernia Greens, etc.

of political evil with citizenship often illegally conferred upon them and as the ignorant tools of corrupt politicans in innumerable election frauds.

The inevitable result was the early development of nativist sentiment especially in the State of Louisiana. In 1835 a representative of the property-holding interests of New Orleans protested against "the great expense that *we* encounter for the support of *foreign paupers* that are vomited on our shores — by thousands." "Is there no remedy?" he asked. "These are among the first to join societies, or to be led by the nose by them, in the war of the 'poor against the rich' — fools that would perish in the streets and on the highways, were not means provided, *by property*, for their support!"[10] In the same year there were expressions of opinion in New Orleans against allowing naturalized citizens to hold office. Nativist sentiment soon developed to such a point that associations of native Americans were formed in New Orleans, St. Louis, Louisville, and even in Lexington. The fruits of this movement were seen in petitions to Congress from citizens in various parts of Louisiana and Missouri asking for a repeal of the naturalization laws and sometimes for a law to exclude foreign paupers.[11] Alexander Porter, who had formerly represented Louisiana in the United States Senate, came to believe, as a result of the increased immigration, in the necessity of the amendment of the naturalization laws. Said Porter: "The mass who come are of the poorer and more ignorant classes and show the envy and hatred in which they have been converted to all possessors of property, they are naturally and inevitably thrown into the hands of Demagogues here who flatter their passions, and give a direction to those prejudices which they know make a part, as it were, of their nature."

[10] *Niles' Register*, Vol. XLIX, p. 62.

[11] *Congressional Globe*, 26th Congress, 1st session, pp. 104, 186; *Niles' Register*, Vol. LVIII, p. 10; Vol. LIX, p. 394.

He himself favored a fourteen year period of residence before naturalization and stricter laws in general.[12] The lower house of the Louisiana legislature, however, by an overwhelming vote passed a resolution requesting their Senators and Representatives in Congress to use their influence in favor of a twenty-one year period of residence before naturalization.[13]

It was soon evident that the Whigs of Louisiana and also, though to a much less extent, the Whigs of Missouri and Kentucky were becoming infected by nativistic sentiments. This was a natural development. The Whig party at large represented the aristocratic elements of the nation, those naturally unsympathetic with those classes which were socially and economically less fortunate than themselves. Partly as a result of this fact, partly as the result of the attraction of the name "Democratic" and of definite inducements held out by the Democratic party, the foreign-born voter almost invariably joined the Democratic camp. This meant that the foreign vote, holding the balance of power, was cast on one side of the scales to the great detriment of the Whig cause which was thus overbalanced. Whigs of the Lower Mississippi Valley were able to appreciate the importance of this fact. As Porter said, "Such a mass of ignorance and passion has a most dangerous influence when the parties in the country are nearly balanced."[14] General Taylor, indeed, was unwilling in 1848 to make a contest on strict party lines as the Whigs would be sure to be defeated "particularly when we take into consideration the immense influx of foreigners into the Union who are daily arriving and all of whom are carried to the polls whether naturalized or not,

[12] Alexander Porter to Crittenden, January 2, 1841. — *Crittenden Manuscripts.*

[13] *Niles' Register*, Vol. LIX, p. 404.

[14] Alexander Porter to Crittenden, January 2, 1841. — *Crittenden Manuscripts.*

ninety of whom out of a hundred if not more vote the Democratic ticket.'' [15]

There were two logical extremes of policy: for the Whigs to bid against the Democracy to secure a share of the foreign vote or to take a stand against immigration with the idea of stopping the influx of foreigners from which the Democratic party alone was profiting. The Whigs in general chose to do neither; their natural inclinations prevented them from doing the one, the other alternative was too un-American to win their favor. They were, however, in a position to realize the importance of the evils consequent upon the unrestricted immigration of the time and, accustomed to opposing the foreign-born citizens as political opponents, Whigs were naturally attracted to political nativism.

The Whigs of Louisiana were practically compelled to assume nativistic ground by the tactics of their opponents. Before a special election of a State Senator in New Orleans in September, 1843, hundreds of foreigners were fraudulently naturalized by Judge B. C. Elliott of the city court of Lafayette for which he was promised fees from the local Democratic Committee.[16] At the election the naturalization papers were recognized as valid at all the polls except one, and there the ballot-box was seized and destroyed by the would-be voters and their friends.[17] So strong was the impression of fraud and so loud were the protests of the Whigs that the lower house of the Louisiana legislature appointed a committee to investigate the charges against Judge Elliott. As a result of the report of this committee the House preferred against him articles of impeachment which were tried before the Senate. Elliott was found guilty on all the articles and was formally removed from office.[18] The Senate decided, however, de-

[15] Taylor to Crittenden, March 25, 1848. — *Crittenden Manuscripts.*

[16] *Senate Documents,* 28th Congress, 2nd session, Vol. IX, No. 173.

[17] *Niles' Register,* Vol. LXVI, p. 64.

[18] *Senate Documents,* 28th Congress, 2nd session, Vol. IX, No. 173.

spite the protests of the Whig press, that the verdict did not affect the validity of the certificates of naturalization issued by Judge Elliott.[19]

At the municipal election in April, 1844, and at the State and congressional election on the first of July, there were further clashes in New Orleans between Whigs and naturalized citizens under Democratic direction. The Democrats insisted on the voting rights of persons possessing certificates of naturalization granted in former Judge Elliott's court, and prevented Whig citizens from voting whenever the Whig election officers refused to admit such votes. Public sentiment became strongly aroused. A public mass meeting was held on the Fourth of July, in which the French creoles took a leading part. It protested against "the recent outrage upon the elective franchise", upheld the rights of legal voters, whether native-born or naturalized, and resolved "That we will not permit mercenary foreigners who have by fraud, corruption and perjury, obtained spurious certificates of naturalization, to interfere with our rights and franchises — bought with the best blood of our ancestors and secured to us by the constitution and laws of the state — and we solemnly warn them not to attempt to interfere with those rights — an attempt which they may be assured will be met and repulsed whenever and wherever it may be again made." [20]

There followed, nevertheless, in November even more serious difficulties in connection with the presidential election. The Plaquemines frauds were committed, despite [illegible]peated protests of the Whigs, largely by persons of foreign birth under Democratic leadership. Excitement became even more intense. When the legislature met, the Whig House promptly ordered an investigation

[19] He was convicted of illegally granting about 1748 certificates of naturalization. The question of their validity was shortly tested before the Federal Courts. — *Niles' Register*, Vol. LXVI, p. 277.

[20] *Niles' Register*, Vol. LXVI, pp. 323, 324.

which revealed the part that foreign voters had played largely by resort to fraud and violence in giving the electoral vote of Louisiana to the Democratic candidates. A resolution was therefore passed requesting the Louisiana Senators and Representatives in Congress to use their endeavors to have the naturalization laws amended so as to prevent fraudulent voting.[21] Thus it was that "Whiggery" in Louisiana became so strongly nativistic that no room was left for a State-wide independent third party movement on that basis.

The Whigs of Kentucky, especially those of Louisville, showed similar inclinations toward nativism. George D. Prentice, editor of the *Louisville Journal*, an influential Whig paper, was extremely active in exposing the evils that resulted from unrestricted immigration. His aggressive editorial policy aroused the hostility of the foreign-born against himself and his party not less than it aroused a vigorous nativism among the native-born. A series of clashes led up to a serious outbreak at the time of the August election in 1844. Nativists decided to station themselves at the polls to prevent illegal voting, whereupon the editor of a local German paper, the *Beobachter*, rashly printed advice to the German voters to go to the polls armed and prepared to force a recognition of their rights. This advice the *Journal* translated and circulated with observations as to the seriousness of the situation. The native citizens were aroused; a mob gathered before the *Beobachter* building and threatened the editor and his press. He and a few of the more active German leaders sought safety in flight across the river to Indiana where they remained until the excitement subsided.

In Missouri nativism developed more quietly until, in August, 1845, in the election of members of a convention to remodel the State Constitution, four out of the St. Louis

[21] *Niles' Register*, Vol. LXVII, p. 384.

delegation of six were Native Americans.[22] In the charter election at St. Louis in April of the following year the whole "American" ticket was elected, the Whigs having placed no ticket in the field.[23] In both Kentucky and Missouri State nativist organizations were formed and were represented at the first National Convention of the Native Americans at Philadelphia in July, 1845.[24]

Following the presidential contest of 1844, Johnson and Barrow, the two Whig United States Senators from Louisiana, openly advocated a modification of the naturalization laws, especially the extension of the residence requirement to twenty-one years. When Congress convened Johnson introduced a resolution into the Senate, instructing the Judiciary Committee to inquire into the expediency of such a modification, and as to the necessity of introducing additional guarantees against fraudulent naturalization, against fraud and violence at elections, and against the introduction of foreign convicts.[25] To make possible a thorough investigation of these points, Barrow, his colleague, submitted supplementary resolutions enlarging the scope of the inquiry and giving the Committee authority to send for persons and papers and to take testimony by commission.[26] Both resolutions passed and Commissioners examined into conditions at all the chief ports, including New Orleans. The Commissioners at New Orleans found that they were seldom able to secure the attendance of Democrats as witnesses; after having examined a number of Whigs, who were pronounced in their nativism and who explained the local situation, they

[22] *Niles' Register*, Vol. LXVIII, p. 400.

[23] *Niles' Register*, Vol. LXX, p. 112.

[24] Lee's *American Party in Politics*, p. 229; *Niles' Register*, Vol. LXVIII, pp. 292, 307.

[25] *Senate Journal*, 28th Congress, 2nd session, pp. 30, 37.

[26] *Senate Journal*, 28th Congress, 2nd session, pp. 40, 44.

Another resolution by Johnson called for such papers in the Department of State as might throw light on the transportation of paupers and criminals to this country by the European governments.

completed their report by adding to this testimony the data gathered in the two investigations previously made by the Louisiana legislature.[27]

The nativistic inclinations of the Whigs increased with their disappointment over Clay's defeat in 1844. This they attributed in large part to the solid array in the Democratic ranks of the foreign-born voters augmented by an unprecedented series of fraudulent naturalizations in the Atlantic seaboard States and in Louisiana. Whigs in the Lower Mississippi Valley commented on this point with great bitterness of feeling. This was true even in Alabama and in Mississippi, States in which very little attention had hitherto been given to either the foreigner or the nativist. "By enlisting foreigners on their side through the darkest frauds ever practiced in a free Government, Democratic leaders have come into power," declared the *Tuscaloosa Monitor* of November 20th. "The question will probably arise whether the Government is to be controlled by the native population, or by rabble foreigners, many of whom are from the lazar-houses and jails of Europe. It is not to be disguised that the most disorderly, profligate, and dangerous classes in our large cities are ignorant foreigners."[28] The *Vicksburg Constitutionalist* filled its first issue after the election with nativist arguments and soon became the organ for this movement.[29] Clay's friends everywhere in condoling with him over his defeat burst out in bitter denunciation of the part played by foreigners in making possible the Democratic victory. "With their name, their corruptions, and their numbers they will continue to beat us forever — unless, indeed, we can check them by restraining, if not destroying, the influence of foreigners — There is a deep feeling on that subject throughout the country,

[27] *Senate Documents*, 28th Congress, 2nd session, Vol. IX, No. 173, pp. 144-197.

[28] Miller's *Bench and Bar of Georgia*, Vol. II, p. 388.

[29] *Mississippi Historical Society Publications*, Vol. IX, p. 186.

which I hope will be responded to from Washington, and I think Whig politicians need not be afraid of it — for if we cannot whip our opponents on that question we are whipped forever." So wrote a correspondent of Crittenden who was personally familiar with the situation in every part of the Lower Mississippi Valley.[30] Clay himself saw reasons for alterations in the naturalization laws, but feared that the time was not quite ripe for a correction; he acknowledged strong sympathies for the Native Americans and their party and thought that they ought "to cultivate friendly relations together." [31]

As the excitement which followed the election of 1844 subsided and new and important issues, the Mexican War question and the sectional quarrel over the territorial question, came to the front, nativism everywhere steadily declined and passed from the field of active politics until new conditions furnished a basis for a new and greater nativist movement. The revival of nativism, however, did not come for several years when it arrived under conditions which gave promise of considerable success.

Stronger than ever before were the motives for what proved to be the most successful expression of political nativism in American history. For one thing, the period of the early fifties, under the impulse of famine conditions and of unsuccessful revolutionary movements in Europe, brought an unprecedented flood of foreign immigration. As a result the States of the Lower Mississippi Valley received both desirable and undesirable accessions to their population. The additions of questionable desirability were of two classes: one was made up of the physically and mentally defective immigrants who were often directed by immigrant agents to take ship for New Orleans where the provisions for excluding them were not strin-

[30] A. T. Burnley to Crittenden, December 3, 1844. — *Crittenden Manuscripts.*

[31] Coleman's *Life of J. J. Crittenden*, Vol. I, p. 224; Clay to J. M. Clayton, December 2, 1844. — *Clayton Manuscripts.*

gent,[32] and who in the Southwest, like their kind elsewhere, became parasites in the large cities; the other included many "red" reformers who, as political exiles from their native lands, were naturally ultra-Democratic, who did not hesitate to criticise American Democracy as a mongrel or bogus type, and even to designate the United States as a sham land of liberty. As to the latter, groups of the more aggressive sort gathered in the cities where they often organized so as to secure for the foreign vote a larger political influence. A German of this type, as editor of the *Anzeiger des Westens* at St. Louis, at an early date recommended that the Germans form a separate political party, a proposal which stirred up considerable excitement.[33] Louisville became a center for the German political exiles and the headquarters of a national association of "Free Germans" which was formed so that the Germans might be able "to exercise a power proportionate to their numbers and adapted to their principles."[34]

A second factor which helped to determine the strength of this later nativist movement in the Southwest was the bearing of foreign immigration on the slavery issue. About 1850 Southern slaveholders began to see that the extensive population, prosperity, and political strength of the North were in large part due to the accession of emigrants from Europe, who were coming to American shores by the hundreds of thousands every year, bringing annually to the North an adult population larger than the voting strength of certain Southern States.

[32] The State Department informed the mayor of New Orleans of this fact. — Sanderson's *Republican Landmarks*, p. 80.

This was in spite of the fact that Louisiana had in 1850 enacted more stringent legislation to prevent the immigration of persons who would be liable to become a public charge or a public nuisance. — Cluskey's *Political Text-book*, p. 219.

[33] *St. Louis Intelligencer*, August 19, September 24, 25, 1851; *National Intelligencer*, September 11, 1851.

[34] *National Intelligencer*, April 27, 1854.

Realizing this, they became ready to oppose in Congress proposals for a homestead law in which the unnaturalized foreigner should be given the same treatment as the American citizen and proposals for equal political rights for foreigners in the Territories, both of which they interpreted as attempts at providing inducements for further accessions to the strength of the North. As the foreign immigrants and the foreign-born citizens, who came to this country instinctively prejudiced against slavery, began to display their anti-slavery propensities,[35] many Southerners regardless of party affiliations beheld in nativism a means of self-defense which they felt would aid them in the dread sectional controversy.

They felt that nativism would serve as a cloak to hide their sectional motives in opposing such a liberal treatment of the foreigner as would stimulate further immigration to the North. Indeed, they so used it in 1854 in the debates on the general Homestead Bill and on the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. As to the proposition to give political rights to unnaturalized foreigners in the new Territories, Senator Atchison of Missouri, a Democrat, declared: "It is not that I fear the votes of the foreign population upon the question of slavery in the Territories of Kansas and Nebraska; but it is upon the great principle that none but American citizens should exercise the right of suffrage and the right of holding office, either in the States or Territories."[36] On the question of extending homestead rights to unnaturalized aliens the Southerners again advocated this same principle that native, or even naturalized, citizens who had rendered some service to the

[35] Many of these foreigners were ready with expressions of sympathy for the negro and denounced slavery as a "political and moral cancer." About the time when the Kansas-Nebraska Bill was before Congress they began to speak out with especial boldness. The *Illinois Staats Zeitung*. September 20, 1854, issued an appeal for a Republican party, a great American "Liberty Party." *Missouri Republican*, September 25, 1854.

[36] *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Congress, 1st session, Appendix, p. 301.

country, ought to be favored over newly arrived aliens, who were unacquainted with our language and institutions and often of questionable reputation and moral character. Some, however, revealed their real motive. Senator C. C. Clay of Alabama, who in 1838 had declared that foreigners ought to be treated liberally and ought to be given preëmption rights, now declared against the policy of giving them homestead rights on the ground that no measure was "better calculated to excite, to foster, and encourage a Native American feeling" than the Homestead Bill with this feature. He predicted that if the Bill passed unamended a powerful Native American party would soon appear in the Southern States.[37]

Nativism was revived in the early fifties first in the Northern States where under favoring conditions an organization was formed, which came to be generally known as the Know Nothing party; soon a fiery wave of nativism swept over the whole country. In the early part of 1854 it began to make its appearance in the Lower Mississippi Valley. In New Orleans, where fraudulent naturalization and fraudulent voting continued to flourish, nativist sentiment revived in a more aggressive form; a secret political order was organized, a "reform" ticket was placed in the field, and in a local election in March, 1854, the majority of the "reform" candidates were elected.[38] A little later at St. Louis, the nativists suddenly developed great strength and won an important victory.[39] Similar success rewarded nativist efforts in the municipal elections in Nashville and elsewhere in the Southwest.[40] This was rapidly followed by the formation of State organizations which sent delegates to represent them at the National Councils of the order. Alabama was represented at the first Grand Council of the order in June, 1854.

[37] *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Congress, 1st session, p. 1705.

[38] *New Orleans Bulletin*, March 29, 1854.

[39] *St. Louis Intelligencer*, August 1, 2, 4, and 7, 1854.

[40] *Nashville Republican Banner*, October 2, 3, and 4, 1854.

In Mississippi, as in Louisiana, there was soon a strong nativist organization of indigenous origin which remained for some time without any affiliation with the national order.

The local and State organizations of the Know Nothing or American party in the Lower Mississippi Valley did not sympathize with that strong anti-Catholic feature which was a necessary concomitant, indeed, almost a synonym of nativism in the North. Where there were few Catholics — and in most of the Southern States they constituted but a very small fraction of the population — most Americans disclaimed any intention of religious proscription.[41] In Louisiana, where the strong Creole element was largely Catholic, persons of that faith were admitted into the local order in which many of them occupied prominent positions. An attempt was made by the Southern representatives in the American National Council of June, 1855, to abolish the religious test from the party creed; because it failed, the regular Louisiana delegation was given no recognition by the national organization.[42] The Louisiana State Council rejected the religious test imposed by the National Convention and immediately nominated for the approaching State election a mixed ticket of Protestants and Catholics headed by a Catholic Creole candidate for Governor.[43] Representatives of the American party of Louisiana continued to demand that the anti-Catholic feature of the national platform be struck out.[44] The Alabama and several other State organizations in the South officially disclaimed any intention of religious proscription[45]

[41] *Nashville Republican Banner*, January 21, 26, and April 11, 1855; *Mobile Advertiser*, May 5, June 16, July 8, and September 1, 1855.

[42] *New York Herald*, June 6-16, 1855; *New Orleans Bulletin*, June 23 and 25, 1855.

[43] *New Orleans Bulletin*, July 6, 1855; *New Orleans Bee*, July 6 and 7, 1855.

[44] Speech of Eustis in *Congressional Globe*, 34th Congress, 1st session, p. 166.

[45] *Mobile Advertiser*, June 16, 1855; *Savannah Republican*, June 30,

The American party in the Southwest, however, suffered from the association with it of religious proscription and from the charge of religious intolerance. It succeeded in the State elections in 1855, nevertheless, in attracting a following of about the same size as the Whig opposition which it replaced. This included victories in Kentucky and Tennessee, although in the latter Andrew Johnson, a Democrat, was reëlected Governor in a close contest. Altogether, in Louisiana and the four States on the eastern side of the lower Mississippi, the Americans polled nearly 215,000 votes, or only sixteen thousand less than their veteran opponents.

Throughout the South, particularly in the Southwest, the members of the defunct Whig party were strongly attracted to the possibilities in this American party as an effective reorganization of the opposition. The traditional conservatism of the Whig party and the traditional flavor of aristocracy were taken over by it.[46] Even on the repudiated bonds question in Mississippi the Know Nothings, like the Whigs, recognized the obligations of the State to arrange for their payment.[47]

Conservative Whig slaveholders, and Democrats as well, were attracted to the order also because of its position on the slavery question. It was able in the National Councils to take conservative middle ground, and the Northern members of the party for a time generally evinced a sincere desire to put down the slavery agitation and to check the tide of anti-slavery in their section. The leadership in the Southwest of such men as Senator Bell of Tennessee gave a definite standing to the order and a

1855; *National Intelligencer*, September 6 and October 23, 1855; *New Orleans Bulletin*, August 22, 1855; Lee's *Origin of the American Party*, pp. 225-228.

[46] *The Kosciusko* (Mississippi) *Southern Sun*, April 1, 1854, called it an organization "gotten up by an infamous conclave of Whig aristocrats in New Orleans."

[47] *The Kosciusko* (Mississippi) *Southern Sun*, November 4, 1854; *Jackson Mississippian*, December 9, 1854; *Vicksburg Sentinel*, April 24, 1855.

proof, if such were needed, of the respectability of the movement.

It is clear, however, that emphasis came to be laid on the sectional question at the expense of a genuine nativism. The American Representatives in Congress from the Southwest were few in numbers but all were surpassed in sincere nativist efforts by Senator Stephens of Mississippi, a former Democrat, who became so active as an advocate of a reform of the naturalization laws (to require a twenty-one year residence before citizenship should be conferred upon an alien) that he was repudiated by the Democratic party of his State.[48] Emphasis in the American party was rather laid on the all-important slavery question: more space in the local platforms and greater attention on the hustings were given to this question than to the fundamental tenets of the party. By this time, however, the American party in the Southern States was influenced by motives vastly different from those of the founders and from those of the nativists of the preceding decade.

Nativism in the South, indeed, had become a party question resting largely on sectional ground. It was on that basis that its strength and weakness was largely determined. It was on that basis that it rested its case in the election of 1856 when it offered in Millard Fillmore, as its candidate for the presidency, a man who as chief executive had been willing to concede to the South a generous consideration in national politics and who took the same ground as candidate for another presidential term. By that time, however, the national organization had been torn to dissension by the force of an unrelenting sectionalism; the strength of the party was in the South but, except in Louisiana and Missouri, it stood in a peculiarly

[48] *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Congress, 2nd session, pp. 15, 24-26; *Congressional Globe*, 34th Congress, 1st session, pp. 6, 450, 1409; *Vicksburg Sentinel*, December 27, 1854, and April 11, 1855.

anomalous position. It took but a few years more for the Southern opposition to drop the "American" *alias* as a disguise that had been penetrated. In the Lower Mississippi Valley the survivals of a genuine nativism continued to drag out a slowly expiring existence.

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